

Survival

Story: Survival

Storylink: <https://www.fanfiction.net/s/8620662/1/>

Category: Lion King

Genre: Adventure/Romance

Author: ThatPersonYouMightKnow

Authorlink: <https://www.fanfiction.net/u/3365186/>

Last updated: 10/24/2012

Words: 12661

Rating: T

Status: Complete

Content: Chapter 1 to 7 of 7 chapters

Source: FanFiction.net

Summary: Simba, Nala and Haiba get stuck in a dire situation. Are the innocent really worth saving?

Chapter 1: Chapter 1: Death Is a Funny Thing

AN: Wow, sorry, everyone. I know—I should have said something, shouldn't I? Disappearing for weeks... What was I thinking? But, you see, I've been clogged up with work for the past few weeks. Not school—I can do that, no problem—but with my own book. You know—sending it off to agents and publishers; stuff like that. Surprisingly, it took up a lot of my time. Plus I closed down my other fan fiction account. That took up some time, too. It's all been a big, big mess. Completely out of my control. It won't happen again. At least, I hope so.

But, despite leaving you in the dark for over three weeks, I am now back with a new story. This one, I have to say, is pretty grim. Goes to some dark places. Not so much laughs. But you all love bleak, morbid, depressing scenes to lighten up your day, don't you? You sick people. And it's not even Halloween yet. Although I do have something special planned for that...

Survival

Chapter One: Death Is a Funny Thing

Nala was dying.

She couldn't exactly say it was the first time this had happened. In fact, she'd been in so many deadly situations that it made her head spin just to think about it. After being attacked, stomped on, brainwashed and tortured, she kind of... settled in.

Or at least, she thought so. Surely after being subjected to such a high level of danger so many times, it became second nature, right? Apparently not. Because when you're dying—when you *really* know you're dying—all the other life-threatening things just seem pale in comparison.

"Agh!"

Nala couldn't stop screaming. It hurt too much not to. That was one of her worst fears: being in so much pain, but to a degree that it just persisted for what seemed like ages. It never ended. The type of pain that just made you pine for death because it would be a blessed release. It was *that* bad. "Agh!"

She just couldn't comprehend how things had managed to get so bad. It seemed like any other ordinary adventure that she embarked on with Simba and Haiba. The classic 'having fun while almost getting yourself killed' kind of thing that they did on a regular basis. After a previous encounter with their archenemy Hago, this actually seemed like something of a break.

But it had proved to be one of their greatest challenges ever. And one of the most fatal.

Shaking and trembling, unable to take in the pain, Nala craned her neck around to get a look at her killer. It was so surprising—so confusing—that she could scarcely believe it.

A boulder. Crushing half of her body while she was stuck halfway up what looked like the tallest cliff in the world. All the things she'd seen—evil magicians, psychotic cubs, Death—and a damn boulder was going to be the death of her. What a joke!

"Agh!"

But it didn't seem so funny. In fact, it was quite the opposite. Laughing was the *last* thing Nala had on her mind right now. All she could think about was the pain. The neverending, agonising pain. She just wanted to die. Couldn't life just leave her alone? Had she not suffered enough? When was it going to end?

"Nala..."

Simba's voice rang in her head. She knew it was just her imagining things, but all the same, it was a relief to hear. That one little cub who could inject some scant joy into what remained of her life.

"Nala... Nala..."

She glanced at the small pool of blood seeping out from underneath her. The boulder bore into her skin, crushing her even more. She couldn't move. She was paralysed. She barely even had the strength to keep her eyes open.

"Nala... Nala... Nala..."

His voice sounded so faint. It was as if Simba was trying to get some kind of message out to her. Some sort of... mystical summons that she just couldn't ignore. She had no choice but to listen to him.

And then she saw it.

Maybe... maybe he was calling her to that... bright golden light that had suddenly appeared before her eyes? After all, it was so pretty... so enticing... so hypnotic... It certainly looked like a better option than the endless pain. Why not go into the light? It was too good to pass up...

Reaching out with a paw, Nala struggled to inch herself towards the beautiful, glorious light. She had to get to it. It was the ultimate end to her suffering. She just had to get there... Had to... *Had to...*

"Nala!"

And there was Simba's voice again. Only, this time, she didn't want to hear it. This time, it sounded different. This time, it sounded like an obstruction. It was blocking her from the potential pleasure of the light, rather than giving it to her. He was trying to stop her... He didn't want her to enjoy herself... He just wanted her to suffer and die...

Her body flared up with anger. What was the point in prolonging her life any longer? She was only a cub—just starting out on life. Instead of living a pleasant, long existence—like she *should*—it was about to be cut short. Oh, but no, that wasn't enough. The actual *death* was going to be padded out like the chapter of a story that should have ended hundreds of words ago.

"Nala! Wake up! Can you hear me?"

Nala snapped her eyes open—not even realising they had been closed—and noticed that the beautiful light had flicked off in an instant. "Huh?"

Then the pain came rushing back to her, and she screamed again. "*Agh!*"

What had she been seeing? That light... It was so mysterious. What did it mean?

But Nala had little time to dwell on such matters. They seemed trivial when compared with the suffering she was enduring—or at least, *trying* to endure. She didn't know how much longer she could hold out...

Blinking, with tears forming in her eyes, she just about managed to lift her head up. She could see the top of the cliff that loomed over her like a sinister shadow. She could see a hazy, darkened figure at the top.

"S-Simba...?" she croaked, unable to determine whether it was him or not. That part where he had been shouting her name—the last time, anyway—just had to be real. He was trying to find her. Help. And—that is, if he could—fix things.

"Nala! Where are you?"

His voice sounded clearer this time. Those previous occurrences had to be hallucinations of some kind. In the pain, she had conjured up her own mental versions of Simba—and eternal, glorious light—in order to alleviate some of the agony. Her mind worked in mysterious ways sometimes... Especially when she was mere moments away from death.

"Nala! Say something!"

Oh, how she wished she could. But it wasn't that simple. Just saying his name made it hard for her. The boulder weighing down upon her was simply far too liberating for her to form words. The pain... It hurt so much... And it was getting worse with each passing moment.

"S-Sim... ba..." she rasped, but it just wasn't good enough. He wouldn't hear her. Not in a million years. She was doomed. Utterly doomed. She was going to die right there, lonely and without hope. No hope at all.

Her head was swimming, vision blurred with bemusement. She couldn't even tell what was up or what was down anymore, let alone speak. Her senses were slowly being drained away, like a wet rag being wrung out. Her eyes flickered; it felt like she was about to succumb to an eternal sleep, never to wake up ever again.

So this was what dying felt like. No bright light. No salvation. No indication of something better. Just... being sucked away from everything. She wasn't leaving life. It was leaving her.

Nala did not believe the old notion that, when someone is about to die, their life flashes before their eyes. After all, she had faced death so many times, and not experienced such a thing once. Not when Hago had tortured her for months, nor

when on the receiving end of Shocker's evil powers. Not once, during the horrible encounters with villains, monsters and vampires.

Never. Not even close to it.

This time, however, it was different. As Nala knew—*knew without a doubt*—that she was near death, the recent events of her life tore through her skull like the most sudden bolt from the blue that one can experience. Everything flashed before her eyes.

And it made her want to scream.

***Chapter 2*: Chapter 2: Something in the Trees**

Chapter Two: Something in the Trees

36 Hours Earlier...

"Simba!" Nala complained, as she trudged up a steep hill. "How much farther is it?"

Simba, Nala and Haiba were on one of their many treks through the jungle. It had become a sort of home away from home for them. Plus, there was always an inordinate amount of adventures to be found. A lot of spooky things seemed to occur in the odd place...

However, their destination for this particular journey was actually home: the Pride Lands. After a horrific—and surprisingly musical—encounter with Hago, they just wanted to go back and collapse in the den for two days straight. And the hot sun and endless hills weren't helping at all. The exhaustion was getting worse.

"It can't be much more," Simba assured her, looking tired himself. Having been awake for more than twenty hours straight, he felt like knocking himself over the head with a rock just to fall unconscious. He couldn't believe how tiring this was. "Just... a little... further..."

"You said that two hours ago," Haiba told them, opening his mouth wide and letting out a long yawn. "And so far, I haven't seen anything that looks *remotely* close to the Pride Lands. I think we're lost."

"We are *not* lost," Simba stated. "It's just a matter of... finding out where we are."

"In other words: we're lost," Nala said through half-closed eyes.

Simba paused. "Yeah..." he sheepishly admitted.

They were lost. So lost that he was just walking anywhere in the hope of getting back home. Besides, it wasn't like he could do anything else. As the leader of the group, it was his job to find the way home—right? "Okay, so we're a little lost—but it's not like we can't find our way back."

"And just how are we going to do that?" Haiba panted, his mouth dry from doing nothing but walking all day. What he'd give for a drink of water... "I haven't been awake for this long since that unfortunate incident where my eyelids got stuck open."

"How did that work?" Nala asked.

"Well, let's just say that you should never trust a spider to be your girlfriend," he replied mysteriously. "Kissing and webs... It just doesn't work out."

Reaching the top of the enormous hill, the three cubs found that they were overlooking most of the trees—and the millions that followed. Trees, trees, trees. Stretching out for ever. Did this jungle ever end? And worse—they could be going in completely the opposite direction!

"It all looks the same," Nala sighed, deflated. Couldn't they ever get a lucky break? Just once? That was all she was asking for! "I just don't get it. How on earth did we lose our way like this?"

"I blame Tama and her huge jumps," said Haiba. "She's completely messed with our minds, causing us to lose all sense of direction. Does anyone else think that up is down and left is right?"

"No," Simba and Nala both replied.

"Oh. Just me, then." Haiba started looking around. "The world can be really weird sometimes."

"And *you* can be weird *all the time*," Nala retorted. "Aren't there any Grand Lands tricks of yours that can suddenly take us back home?"

"Not really," Haiba replied, while scratching his head. "I can kill you with my tail, if that helps with anything."

"Yes, Haiba—it'll be a big help," Nala said sarcastically. She sighed. "It's hot, I'm tired, and feel like killing someone. Can things get any worse?"

Needless to say, she was mere moments away from collapsing due to exhaustion. They hadn't slept for just under a

day, not to mention that they were completely lost with no idea as to where they were going. Home seemed like millions and millions of miles away; she started to wonder if they should just give up and live here for the rest of their lives.

Simba's eyes carefully scanned the surrounding area. "Trees," he concluded. "So many trees!"

"Well done, genius," said Nala. "Would you like a reward?"

"She's starting to get irritated," Haiba noticed. "You know, Simba, that you won't like her when she's angry."

"*She's* going to *murder* you if you don't keep your mouth shut!" Nala snapped angrily. "Simba, figure out a way to back to the Pride Lands. You *have* to."

"I'm thinking, I'm thinking," he said hurriedly. He really was trying—but there just seemed to be an absence of ideas in his head. This was turning out to be a lot more of a challenge than he'd expected. "Okay, so obviously, we can't get home by ourselves."

"Obviously," Haiba said.

"So, why don't we ask someone for directions?" Simba asked with a grin, as if he had suddenly come up with the greatest idea in the world.

"Yeah, that would work," Nala said. "If there was anyone around within *a hundred million miles*!"

"Aw, they're all just hiding," Simba assured her, waving a paw in the air. "There has to be someone around. Otherwise what's the point of having all this space?"

"Maybe so innocent cubs can get lost for ever?" Haiba jokingly guessed.

"And if you're talking about asking for directions, then why didn't you think to ask Tojo and Tama before we left yesterday?" Nala interjected.

"I didn't think we'd get lost at the time," Simba said with a shrug. "Why didn't any of *you* think to ask?"

"We didn't think we'd get lost at the time," both Nala and Haiba said.

Simba's face fell. "Of course you didn't. Now, come on. Let's start hunting around—see if there's anyone nearby. *Someone* has to know where the Pride Lands are."

Simba took a step forwards—

—and ended up tumbling down the hill.

"Ow! Oof! Eek! Ah!" he cried as he rolled over and over.

Nala and Haiba winced as Simba landed in a heap at the bottom. "That's gotta hurt," Nala said.

"I'm okay," Simba said, weakly raising a claw. "The rocks broke my fall."

Nala and Haiba exchanged an unsure look as they headed down the hill towards the fallen Prince.

Simba hauled himself to his paws. "Wow, that woke me up," he grunted, before looking around. "I can't see anyone—yet."

"It looks like the middle of nowhere," Haiba said, narrowing his eyes. "Unless there are little tree beasts living around here, I don't think we'll find anything that's *living*. Maybe a few skeletons—but that's it."

"It could be a graveyard of doom, for all we know," Nala said, peering through the darkness created by the trees beyond. "There could be zombies waiting to devour us. You know—cousins to the Family of Blood."

"I have a cousin," Haiba blurted out, before frowning. "She doesn't speak to me anymore."

"I can't imagine why," Nala said with a sly smile. "Simba, answer me something: Do you see any kind of living creature nearby?"

Simba thought for a moment. "Uh... no. I guess not."

Nala's smile broadened. "Then *that* means that it's an evil, secret place that nobody ever comes out of. Now, what do you

say we just turn around and go back in the complete opposite—?"

She was interrupted by a loud rustling in the trees. Like someone was watching them from above...

"What was that?" Nala suddenly asked, head snapping upwards.

But there was nothing to be seen.

"M-m-maybe it was just the wind," Simba stammered nervously. "You know—it is a little chilly around here."

"There's no wind," Haiba said. "It's been hot all day. No breeze."

Despite the heat, Nala felt chilled to the bone. There was something about that noise in the trees... She didn't like it. Not at all.

"Maybe we should just... go back," Simba suggested.

Haiba nodded. "Yeah. Good idea. What do you say, Nala?"

She too nodded. "Yep. Go back. Perfect plan. Let's get out of here—before something bad happens."

The three cubs turned around—

—and saw something rush past in the corner of their eyes.

"Did you see that?" Nala cried, eyes darting around the area. Something—or *someone*—was definitely stalking them. Clearly it wasn't the wind causing this... "It looked like... a thing."

"I don't like things," Haiba said, starting to shake slightly. "Things scare me."

"But I'm a thing," Simba said worriedly. "*You're* a thing!"

"Yikes!" Haiba yelped in fear, jumping into Simba's forepaws and cradling him like he was his mother. "Save me, Simba! I don't wanna be a thing!"

Simba dropped him to the ground. "Just calm down, Haiba," he said, trying to be assertive. Leaders had to be brave. "I'm sure there's a perfectly rational explanation for—"

Whoosh!

The three cubs whipped round, and watched, as—not one—but *three* darkened figures leapt down from the trees.

Simba, Nala and Haiba huddled together, horrified at what they were seeing...

AN: All the ThatPersonYouMightKnow hallmarks are back—including the devious cliffhangers. I know, deep down, that you love them. Otherwise you'd just give up on these stories and walk away for ever. Well, the next two chapters should be up tomorrow. Don't worry, I'm not going AWOL on you again. And I shall try not to get knocked down by a bus. Safety first, kids...

Chapter 3: Chapter 3: Liars and Cheats

AN: It may not seem like it, but this story is going to get darker. *Much* darker. Maybe I should have saved this story for Halloween after all. It is quite spooky. Then again, I do have a very good idea for that next story, so it looks like you get *two* spooky stories this October from me! Aren't you lucky?

Thanks for the reviews too, everyone. Time for a couple of replies:

Haradion: Just about every character has been close to death in these stories. Simba, Nala, Haiba, Tojo, Tama, Sarafina... The list goes on and on and on. Maybe Nala will die; maybe she won't. No one will know until the end...

anonymous13: I never thought of it like *The Emperor's New Groove*, although I suppose the openings are similar in a way. However, this story isn't exactly filled with jokes...

Chapter Three: Liars and Cheats

As Simba, Nala and Haiba cowered together in fear, it didn't take very long for them to realise that their fears were irrational. In other words, they were just being silly.

"Oh," said Haiba, relieved. "They're not monsters."

Three new cubs had stepped out from the darkness, looks of curiosity splayed across their own faces. The one on the right was a male—he had brown fur with eyes that were so bright that they looked yellow. Stood in the middle was another male—he had strangely grey fur and blue eyes. The cub on the right was female—she had golden-brown fur and hard brown eyes. Simba and Nala didn't recognise any of them.

Haiba, however, was a different story.

"Oh, no." He looked particularly concerned. "Oh, no, no, no."

"What?" Nala asked, noticing how worried he looked. It had to be some kind of villainous cub from the war days of his pride. Who else could it be? This cub was mean! She was out for blood! She wanted to rip them apart!

"I don't believe it," spat the female cub in disgust. "It's *you*."

"It's *you*," Haiba retorted, taking a step forward in bewilderment, almost as if he couldn't believe what he was seeing. "Binamu?"

"Banana-what?" Simba and Nala exclaimed.

Haiba scratched his head, looking like he would rather be someplace else—preferably a million miles away. "Uh, guys—this is Binamu. She's my, uh... cousin."

"Your *cousin*?" Nala said. "As in, the one that doesn't speak to you anymore?"

Haiba nodded sheepishly. "The very same."

"Are you his girlfriend?" Binamu asked, poking a claw in Nala's chest. "Because if he is, then I suggest that you watch where you put your mouth."

"For your information, I'm *not* his girlfriend," Nala informed her, "and believe me, I have no intention of putting my mouth anywhere near his."

"Good," Binamu said, satisfied. "Nice to know that my cousin knows his place from now on."

"Oh, come on, Binamu, it was just a misunderstanding," Haiba said, rolling his eyes.

"*Three weeks!*" Binamu exclaimed in anger. "For three weeks we were together! And then, it turned out we were..." she gagged, "*cousins!*"

Nala was suddenly struck with two emotions—both disgust and humour. Strangely, she wasn't that surprised that Haiba had done such a thing. It certainly wasn't out of the ordinary—he dated twigs, for crying out loud! A part of it was actually quite funny... Nala was concerned that Haiba was rubbing off on her...

"But I didn't know!" Haiba insisted. "My mother never said anything until after the three weeks!"

Binamu slapped him across the face. "Don't you lie to me! You knew *very well* what you were up to, you sleaze! We kissed, cuddled and..." she shuddered, "*ugh*... it makes me feel so sick!"

"You were together with your cousin?" Simba exclaimed, eyes wide with shock. "That's just weird—even for your standards."

Simba had to admit that he had mixed feelings about Haiba's innocence. He was known to lie before—but surely not about something like that? This Binamu cub—who they hadn't even met before—was just pulling their legs, right? Either that or...

... she could be telling the truth, and Haiba really was something of a romantic monster, preying on all females—males, too—and their weaknesses. Maybe there was no stopping him, and he could be the greatest villain they'd ever, ever encountered!

Nah. That was just stupid.

"It wasn't my fault!" Haiba protested, rubbing his burning cheek. "We hadn't even met each other! And ever since, she's hated me!"

"Well, I wonder why that is," Binamu said sarcastically. "Probably because you're the sickest cub who ever lived!"

"*True*," Haiba agreed, "but even the sickest of cubs have their limits. Getting together with my cousins is out of the question!"

Binamu scoffed. "Yeah, right. And I'm a snake. I bet you've been having secret relationships with your brothers and sisters too!"

"Now that's just ridiculous," Haiba said. "The worst I ever made out with was... well, you, actually."

Binamu rolled her eyes. "I can't even believe cubs like you hang around with this sicko!" she said to Simba and Nala. "Do you have any idea how much of a *monster* he is?"

"Um, well, we have been known to experience some of Haiba's... *personality*," Simba told her, "but he's always been polite about it."

"Oh, so it's okay if he makes out with his cousin as long as he asks *nicely* first," Binamu retorted.

"I didn't mean it like that," Simba said.

He noticed that the two male cubs by Binamu were being strangely quiet. She was obviously the leader, and Simba pitied them. Having a cub that did nothing but shout, shout, shout all the time had to be something of an earache... His own ears were ringing just *thinking* about her! Couldn't she just shut up for two seconds?

Binamu turned to the two male cubs. "Aibu, Wafu—let's get out of here. I'm sick of hanging around with my... *sick* cousin!"

"But don't they know the way out of here?" the cub with greyish fur—called Aibu—whispered. He looked rather shy. Clearly he wasn't much of a talker—Binamu did plenty of *that*...

"Who cares if they know the way out?" Binamu yelled. "I'm not taking any advice from that weirdo!"

"But we've been stuck here for days," the other cub, Wafu, protested. He looked desperate. "And you know it's because of the curse—"

"*Shh!*" Binamu hissed, clamping a paw over his mouth. "We're not supposed to talk about that, you dummy!"

"Curse?" said Simba, intrigued. "What curse?"

Binamu sighed. "You mean to tell me that sneaky, good-for-nothing cubs like yourselves don't know anything about the curse that haunts this part of the jungle?"

"No," Nala replied, stepping forward, "but we'd love to find out."

"Um, Binamu, I'm not really sure you should—" Aibu said, before being cut off by her.

"Shut up, Aibu! I know what I'm doing!" Binamu proclaimed, a sly smile spreading across her face. "If these idiots want to know about the curse, then they might as well hear it!" She turned to Simba, Nala and Haiba. "The curse you're looking for is the Mabaya Curse. Rumour has it that some stupid wizard put a curse on this section of the jungle because he fell through a hole around here. Ever since, horrible monsters have stalked the place, killing anyone dumb enough to pass through."

"Explains why you're here," Haiba mumbled.

"Okay, so how do you get out?" Simba inquired.

"You don't," said Binamu. "You *can't*. Anyone who walks in will just keep going around in a circle if they try to escape. We've been stuck here for four days."

"Come to think of it, everything's looked the same for the past few hours we've been walking around," Nala suddenly noticed. "I guess that means—"

"—we're trapped too," Simba finished for her. "And there's *no* way to get out?"

"Not unless you walk the Path of Death," Wafu informed him. "But it's impossible. No one's ever survived—that's why we've been sticking to this part of the jungle."

"Oh, come on," Haiba said. "It can't be *that* bad."

"It's where the monsters are," Wafu told him. "Go in there and we'd be dead in seconds. To get through, we would have to clear the Pit of Despair, traverse the Weeds of Wrath and climb the Mountain of Utter Evil and Nasty Things. It's suicide!"

"Suicide is our speciality," Nala said. "And things like that are mostly rumours. It could be harmless."

"It's not harmless," whispered Aibu.

"Not harmless?" Haiba laughed. "And why's that?"

"Because the monsters have already killed one of our friends."

Chapter 4: Chapter 4: The Path of Death

Chapter Four: The Path of Death

"They already *killed* someone?" Nala cried in alarm. This sounded serious. If there were monsters—*killers*—out there, then something was very wrong indeed. "But—but, how?"

"They just grabbed him," Wafu told her. "And then... ripped him in half."

"It was horrible," Aibu whimpered. "The blood was all over the trees. Everywhere. I almost threw up."

"I sympathise," said Haiba, an unpleasant sensation forming in his own stomach. But maybe that was just a result of seeing Binamu again... "If there are monsters out there, then what do they want?"

"They don't want anything, stupid," Binamu retorted. "They just want to kill things! That's all monsters are for! They're evil!"

"I think you should calm down," Nala advised. "You're not exactly helping us out here."

"Don't you tell me what to do!" Binamu yelled. "I'm the boss around here! If you can't deal with that, then I just might have to throw you to the monsters."

"No one is throwing anyone *anywhere*," Simba said sternly. "Nala's right—we need to relax. It's not like anything's going to happen to us just by *standing* here. We can think up a plan."

"And when have any of *our* plans worked before?" Haiba asked.

"Well, they've... *half-worked*," Simba replied. "I guess that's something."

"Yeah—and maybe it'll get us *half* there," Binamu said sarcastically. "Are you all just completely incompetent?"

"Let them think, Binamu," Aibu said quietly.

She glowered at him. "And since when do *you* get to order me around?"

"Just... let them come up with something," he said, shifting nervously in his spot. "That's all."

"You just keep your mouth shut," Binamu said, before turning to the three cubs. "Look, if you're going to come up with a plan, then it'd better be quick!"

"Why not just walk the Path of Death?" Nala suggested with a shrug. "It's not like we can do anything else."

"Excuse me?" Binamu couldn't believe what she was hearing. "Have you been *listening* to what I'm saying? It's the Path of Death! *Path! Of! Death!* Am I getting through to you?"

"And what other bright ideas do you have?" Nala retorted, unfazed. "If anything, you're making us stupider by the minute."

"Why, you little..." Binamu got ready to attack her, only for Wafu to intervene.

"Binamu, fighting with each other isn't going to help," he said. "We need to work together if we stand a chance of escaping from this place."

Binamu opened her mouth to argue. "But—" She saw the stares everyone was giving her, and backed down. "Fine. Let's just think of a stupid plan."

"Now, *stupid* plans we can do just fine," Haiba said cheerily. "It's the smart ones that stump us."

"All right, so think of a *stupid* plan," Binamu said. "Come on!"

"I still say we should try that Path of Death," Nala said. "We're just trying to ignore that it's the only option."

"Is it possible to outrun these monsters?" Simba asked.

"Yes," said Wafu. "We did—otherwise we would have ended up in the same way as our friend. They're still quick, though. Once they've got you, you're a goner."

"We can run," Simba said. "All we do is run away—like the cowards we are."

"We're not cowards," Haiba said. "It's just that everyone likes to chase us. Why are all the bad guys so cheesy?"

"*You're* cheesy," Nala responded. "So, if we can outrun these monsters, then we should be fine—shouldn't we?"

"I guess," Wafu said with a shrug of his shoulders. "It'll still be hard, though. These things... they're just not right. They'll kill you without mercy."

"Then we'll be careful," Simba said, before striding into the maze of trees. "*Very* careful."

Nala and Haiba shot an unsure look at each other before following him. Binamu, Wafu and Aibu trudged after them. "You sure about this?" Wafu asked.

"No," Simba responded, "but it's not like we have much of a choice. I'm not spending the rest of my life sitting around doing nothing."

The area suddenly became thick with fog. It became hard to see. Despite this, the Path of Death didn't seem so fraught with danger after all. Hopefully the monsters had gone away because they'd had enough fresh meat for one day...

"I don't see anything," Haiba said, peering through the fog. If there were any monsters, then they sure enjoyed keeping themselves hidden... "You sure about these monsters?"

"*Very* sure," said Wafu. "This is how they attack. They like to make everything as quiet as possible, and then... they strike."

"You have a habit of making things sound very dramatic, don't you?" Haiba asked, suddenly preferring the silence to Wafu's rather fictional-sounding descriptions. "Can't we go five minutes without danger lurking around every corner?"

"Gee, you're getting very irritable, aren't you?" Nala said, walking alongside him.

"I'm just stressed," he replied, looking like he had seen better days. "I know Binamu is making me out to be some kind of psycho, but... *you* know I'm not—right?"

If there was one cub Haiba trusted, then it was Nala. She... just seemed to have it all sussed out. She was smart and kind. If that meant nothing in life, then Haiba wanted to commit suicide.

"Of course I know you're not," Nala said with a smile, and that was enough to make Haiba feel better already. "You're sick, Haiba—but never in *that* way. You and your cousin... it was just a misunderstanding. Am I right?"

Haiba nodded, grinning. "Yeah! She's got it all wrong. She just has to understand that and move on."

"I wouldn't listen to him, if I were you," Binamu said, strolling past them. "You don't know what kind of *lies* he could be telling."

Nala rolled her eyes. "I can see why you don't like her. Does she trust *anyone*?"

"She used to be nicer," Haiba told her. "Until... well, you know. She kinda lost faith after she found out we were related."

"You don't still love her, do you?" Nala suddenly asked.

"What? No! But... I still care about her," he admitted. "In a cousinly way, of course."

"Maybe you could patch things up," Nala suggested. "Well, if you're careful about it, I mean."

"I guess so," Haiba agreed. "She'd have to be in a *really* good mood to listen to me, though—and she's not exactly the polite type."

"So, uh, you always this quiet, Aibu?" Simba asked, trying to make some friendly conversation with the almost silent cub. It was certainly a lot better than walking around in the deathly silence.

Aibu just mumbled something that Simba couldn't understand. The guy sure liked to keep himself to himself...

"If you don't want to talk to me, that's fine," Simba told him. "I'm just trying to be friendly."

"I know I don't say much," Aibu admitted. "It's just because... I'm kind of shy."

"That's okay," Simba said. "We all get shy sometimes. I guess Binamu doesn't let you get many words in, huh?"

"Not really," Aibu replied with a little laugh. "She's just yelling most of the time. That... cousin of hers really upset her a while back."

"I don't think it's Haiba's fault," Simba said. "He just gets confused sometimes. After all, it wasn't like he *knew* they were cousins, right?"

Aibu shrugged. "I suppose so." He glanced ahead nervously. "I just hope I don't trip."

"Huh?"

"When the monsters come along," Aibu said. "I hope I don't trip. I saw what those monsters did... It was horrible. Binamu and Wafu are tough—they can deal with it. But me... I don't think I've ever felt more scared."

"It's fine," Simba assured him. "I'm scared, too. We're all scared. You'd have to be crazy not to be scared."

And Aibu smiled.

AN: I bet you didn't expect to see Haiba's cousin, did you? Well, I can't pass up a little bit of family feuding. You'll either find Haiba having a relationship with his cousin disgusting or hilarious—maybe even both. I'll just leave it to your own opinions, which I'm sure you'll express in those lovely reviews you send me.

Looks like the monsters are closing in. Some of these cubs just might start dying. I bet you want Binamu to die, don't you? Go on. Say it. She needs to die. Rip her apart. Save Aibu instead. Maybe I will and maybe I won't. We'll see what happens...

Chapter 5: Chapter 5: Attack of the Monsters

AN: Be warned: here lies darkness. This story carries an R rating for violence. You must be at least seventeen years old to enter—unless of course you have an accompanying adult. Or you can just sneak in. Actually, just read it!

kora22: Of course I was just joking when I said that Haiba could be the greatest villain ever. Or was I? I'm tricky that way.

anonymous13: Binamu does indeed mean something in Swahili. In fact, it means 'cousin'. Not the cleverest of names, but it gets the job done.

the-mysterious-other: *Someone* will die. You can count on that. Will it be Aibu? You'll have to wait and see.

MarkPol: Do not be deceived by the first few light chapters of this story. From here on in, it turns deadly. And yeah—Binamu is sort of entertaining. Even if she is an angry loudmouth. I don't have any intention for Haiba to find love at the moment—and certainly not with her. He's gonna be a loner for a while...

Chapter Five: Attack of the Monsters

A loud *whoosh* from somewhere nearby caused the cubs to stop dead in their tracks. That wasn't just the wind. They weren't alone. Someone—or *something*—was watching them. Waiting to strike, as Wafu had said.

"Is that the..." Nala gulped nervously, "monsters?"

"It wasn't the wind, that's for sure," Wafu replied, taking a few tentative steps forward. "I think they're getting ready to pounce."

"Pounce?" said Simba, looking around. "Pounce from where?"

"We'll never know," Wafu said. "In the blink of an eye, we'll be in their claws. You won't ever see it coming."

"That's comforting," Haiba said. "I'm guessing a healthy plan of action would be to run, right?"

Wafu nodded. "That would be my suggestion."

"Let's get going," Simba said, before hurrying onwards. Truth be told, he was rather anxious to escape from this dreaded place. It was giving him the creeps. Villainous murderers like Hago and Shocker, he could deal with easily. But this... this was something else. Something that might just be invincible. From what he'd learnt in life, immortality wasn't impossible...

Stomp!

Simba couldn't help but skid to a halt. "What was that?" he asked, whipping round to look at the others.

Stomp!

They had stopped too. "They're coming," Wafu said, eyes darting around, trying to get a glimpse of the horrid creatures. "They have to be close. We have less than a minute."

Stomp!

Simba swallowed hard. Okay, this wasn't just creeping him out—it was starting to get scary. And *fast*. "Come on. There's no use just standing here."

He broke into a run, hoping that the others would follow his example. His eyes scanned the area, but he couldn't see anything. He wished that these monsters—whatever they were—would just come out and show themselves. If they wanted to kill, then why were they holding back? It didn't make sense. Did they just thrive on fear itself?

Maybe they do, Simba thought worriedly. The fear could just be a starter for them—right before the main course...

As for dessert... Well, he just didn't want to think about it.

Binamu sniffed the air. "Smells like smoke," she said. "Can anyone see something burning?"

"No," whispered Aibu, sniffing the air along with her. "But maybe... I think this fog might actually be smoke."

"You might be right. Maybe it is," Simba agreed. "But... what's burning?"

That was when Nala screamed.

Everyone looked to see Nala, with one paw clamped over her mouth and the other pointing at something dangling from a tree in front of her.

"Look! Look!" she cried in a muffled voice.

Narrowing his eyes, Simba approached the 'thing' dangling from the tree. Upon closer inspection, he realised what it was, and gasped in horror.

It was a cub. Suspended from his hind legs by vines, rocking back and forth. He probably had brown fur once—but that was hard to tell, thanks to all of the blood.

The blood. It literally covered—*smothered*—the clearly dead cub. There was a huge, gaping hole in his stomach. It looked like his insides had been ripped right from his body. His eyes were missing—gouged out, most likely. His midsection had been separated from the rest of his body. A pool of guts formed at the base of the tree. It was a mess.

Simba felt like he was going to throw up. He turned his head away from the corpse, and the nausea just about passed. "Oh, gosh... That's sick."

Aibu closed his eyes as tightly as possible and covered them with both paws. He didn't want to *think* about it, let alone *look* at the body. "Tell me when it's over," he mumbled.

Haiba frowned, sick to his stomach at such a sight. "The monsters did this, didn't they?" he asked Wafu. "This... this is your friend—right?"

Wafu nodded solemnly. "That's Damu. And yes—the monsters did this. I just... didn't realise how horrible it was." He looked traumatised.

Simba didn't want to look at it again. He'd seen dead bodies before, but this was on a horrific scale. This cub hadn't just been murdered—he'd been *destroyed*. Mutilated into an unrecognisable, gory lump of flesh.

Binamu remained silent, just glaring at the body. If she had any inner emotions, then nobody was able to see them. She seemed so closed up. Still suffering from the mark Haiba had left on her, most likely.

But then, she spoke. "I'm not letting this happen to me, too." She strode off. "If any of you have good sense, then you'll follow me. Haiba, you can stay if you want."

Haiba rolled his eyes. Was she going to continue to get worked up over a mistake? If anyone was to blame here, then it was his mother for even suggesting that he work up a relationship with Binamu. "You know, Binamu, you really have to learn to let things go!"

"And you have to learn how to act like a normal cub," Binamu shot back over her shoulder.

"You should learn the *same* lesson," Haiba muttered under his breath. "You're *anything* but normal."

The snapping of twigs caused everything to fall silent once more. Another sound followed after it. A chilling, horrid sound.

Something breathing. It was a loud, raspy, wheezy sound. A typical sound from a creature... or a *monster*...

"Don't stop," Simba said quietly, picking up the pace. "We have to keep running."

The monster—wherever it was—grunted angrily in response. It didn't take long for Simba to realise that it could *hear* them. It understood what they were saying—and it didn't like it. Simba didn't think they had much longer to wait before it attacked...

Just keep running, he told himself. *Just keep running*.

The grunting got louder. Everyone started to notice it. Nala focused on the path ahead of her. Haiba frowned. Binamu glanced left and right nervously. A worried look crossed Wafu's face. Aibu just shook and trembled in fear.

The noise was echoing across the jungle now. A rustling in nearby bushes was heard. The monster was just metres away from them. Getting noisier and noisier, until...

With an almighty roar, something leapt out from the trees and skidded to a halt in front of the six cubs.

It was a monster. What a perfect way to describe it. It looked like no animal they had ever seen before. A huge, hulking grey thing with two small hind legs and two humongous forelegs. Razor sharp claws extended from its huge paws. It had a snarling, twisted grey face with fangs that were dripping with blood. It glared at the cubs with a look of pure venom in its eyes.

"Run," Simba whispered.

And they did just that. Sprinting in the opposite direction, hoping in vain that they would escape the monster before it tore them apart—just like it had with that corpse dangling from the tree.

The monster opened its mouth wide and let out a deafening roar. It didn't exactly look too happy about its food escaping.

The cubs kept running. Not looking back. They had to get away. They had to—

Another monster leapt out in front of them. It looked identical to the other.

The six cubs stopped. Looking back and forth, they realised that there were more monsters lurking in the trees. All of them looked hungry.

They were surrounded.

"They've caught us," Aibu said, trembling. "We're going to die."

Forming a circle around them, the monsters closed in. Licking their muzzles at the prospect of such a delicious meal.

With a massive paw, one of the monsters reached out—

—and picked up Wafu.

He screamed, struggling in its grasp. "*No! Please! Let me go! Let me—*"

And the monster bit his head off.

***Chapter 6*: Chapter 6: The Weeds of Wrath**

Chapter Six: The Weeds of Wrath

The thick blood sprayed over the remaining cubs' faces. Their mouths were wide open with shock. Aibu screamed at the top of his lungs as the monster devoured what remained of Wafu.

Crunch! Crunch! Crunch! In just a matter of seconds, all that was left of Wafu was the blood on the monster's muzzle—and even then he licked that clean off. Swallowing the bloody remnants, the monster opened its mouth wide and let out an almighty belch.

A mixture of horror and disgust crossed the cubs' faces. They couldn't believe how deadly these things were. In just a few seconds Wafu had been horribly digested. One little bite and his head had been taken clean off. For Simba, Nala and Haiba, they'd never seen something so destructive.

Simba tasted something salty on his mouth, and realised that it was some of Wafu's blood. Spluttering and coughing it out, he managed to say, "Run!"

No one else wanted to argue. The five cubs pushed past the hungry monsters and bolted away from them as fast as their legs could carry them.

"Where are we going?" Nala yelled as they ran in a random direction.

"*Anywhere!*" Simba replied over his shoulder. "So long as we get away from those... those *things!*"

"I can't believe it!" Binamu cried, her cheek spattered with blood. It looked like she was going to cry. Haiba was surprised at that. "They just ate him! They just... they bit his head off—like they didn't even care!"

It was so unexpected. Wafu was an innocent cub—he'd done nothing wrong—and they'd swallowed him up without mercy. Why? What were these monsters? And why were they so bent on killing them?

Looking over his shoulder, Simba could see the monsters pounding after them. *Stomp! Stomp! Stomp!* He had never seen such fast creatures before. Just a few more seconds and they'd catch up...

"We have to go faster!" Simba urged.

"You don't need to tell us that!" Binamu cried.

"L-look!" Aibu shakily gestured to something up ahead. "Maybe we can hide in that grass over there!"

There was a large clearing in front of them, covered with nothing but tall, thick grass. It looked like an opportune place to hide—that is, if the creatures didn't see them running inside.

"Good idea!" Simba quickened his pace, breathing heavily. His chest was aching. He'd never run so fast in his life!

The monsters were quickly gaining on them. Their speed didn't falter in the slightest. They were focused on one thing only: their dinner, and they would do anything—whatever it took—to get it.

The five cubs all leapt for the tall grass—

—just as the monsters leapt at them.

Collapsing in the grass, Simba watched in amazement as something very strange happened to the monsters.

As they leapt towards the grass, the monsters began to shrivel up into some sort of black mist. Wailing at the top of their voices, the black mist soon dissolved into nothingness.

They were gone.

Nala breathed a sigh of relief. "They're gone," she gasped. "They're gone..."

"But I don't get it," Haiba said, getting to his paws. "How?"

"I guess... I guess they can't leave that part of the jungle," Simba concluded. "If they try, then they just... disappear."

"So is that it?" Nala asked. "Are we free?"

"I don't know," Simba said honestly. "Maybe it's just—"

Nala yelped in surprise as something snagged around her foreleg. "Wha—what?"

A part of the thick grass had coiled its way around her foreleg, grabbing her tightly. She struggled to escape, but it had her trapped. "What the heck's happening?"

"This isn't grass," Aibu said worriedly. "They're *weeds*."

"The Weeds of Wrath..." Binamu whispered, remembering Wafu's previous words. She noticed that the thick weeds were beginning to come to life, swaying back and forth. She cried out in alarm as one snagged her hind leg, yanking her upwards. "Help me!"

One weed wrapped itself around Simba's midsection, sending him reeling backwards. "Yikes! What's up with these weeds?"

"Um... they're showing us their wrath?" Nala guessed, as more weeds secured themselves around her remaining legs. "Agh! These things are tight!"

"Mmm—mmm—mmm!" Simba cried.

"What?" Haiba yelled.

One of the weeds was covering Simba's mouth. "Mmm! Mmm! Mmm—mmm—mmm!"

"Simba, this isn't the time to talk about how cute you are," Haiba said. "Can't you see there are weeds trying to kill us?"

Simba rolled his eyes.

The weeds around Nala's hind legs began to pull in one direction, while the ones around her forelegs pulled in another. She screamed. "They're trying to pull me apart!"

"You think you've got problems," Binamu said, as the weeds tried to enter her mouth. Nala presumed they were trying to choke her.

Haiba dodged out of the way of some weeds that were trying to snag him in their trap. "Oh, no! You're not getting me!" The last thing he wanted was for his to death to be that of a bone-crunching hug from some weeds.

"Haiba, please help me!" Nala cried, as the weeds continued their attempt to pull her apart. "I don't think my body is going to be able to take much more of this!"

"Mmm—mmm!" Simba cried.

"You said it, sister," Haiba replied.

"Haiba!"

"All right, I'm coming!" Haiba hopped over a deadly weed, rushing over to where Nala was. He began to tug at one of the weeds, but they remained a tight hold over her leg. "Man, these are tight!"

"I think I know that!" Nala yelled. Her body had gone numb with pain. She was going to snap like a twig!

Haiba pulled and pulled, but couldn't break the hold they had over her. "Uh..." He looked around, trying to find something that could help.

Deciding on the first thing that popped into his head, Haiba bit down on one of the weeds as hard as he could.

Snap!

The weeds went limp, and turned a dull grey colour, loosening their hold instantly. Nala gasped as she regained control of her body. She was still aching all over, though. "Thank you."

Simba pulled the weeds away from his mouth. "How did you stop it?"

"I bit them," Haiba said with a shrug. "I guess they don't like that. It must have killed them."

"I see why they call it the Path of Death," Nala mumbled as she got to her paws. "That was too close."

"You gonna say something?" Haiba asked, noticing that Binamu had said nothing to him. Not even so much as a 'thank you'. "I *did* just save your life."

"So?" Binamu snorted, walking past him without so much as a second thought.

Just as Haiba suspected. She didn't care.

"We'd better leave," Aibu suggested, shaking off a few weeds. "In case they decide to suddenly come back to life."

The cubs nodded in approval, and headed away from the clearing, towards another section of the jungle.

"What were those other things that Wafu mentioned?" Simba asked, trying to recall as he walked along. "There were the Weeds of Wrath, and—"

"—the Pit of Despair, and the Mountain of Utter Evil and Nasty Things," Binamu finished for him. "It's far from over."

"The Pit of Despair?" Haiba said, striding past them all. "And just how the heck are we supposed to—?"

Haiba didn't get to finish his sentence.

Simba, Nala, Binamu and Aibu stood at the edge of the biggest pit they'd ever seen in their lives. The gap looked impossible to cross. And down, down, *down* below was... nothing. Just blackness. A bleak abyss.

Haiba was dangling from the edge, his claws digging into the dirt. "Aren't any of you going to help me?"

"Oh." Simba and Nala helped to pull him up. He stood back safely, surveying the gap that he had almost fallen from. His mind boggled at how wide the pit was. "So... how are we going to cross *this* one?"

Nala smiled nervously. "Anyone want to jump?"

AN: I think those two chapters are the goriest I've ever written. This is becoming truly horrific. I mean, corpses dangling from trees? It's like something a Predator would do. Maybe I should have some chest-bursting aliens next, huh? Now *that* would have been an interesting death for Wafu.

I bet you all felt sorry for him, right? The poor guy. Getting his head bitten off without a second thought. Plus Simba got some of his blood on his tongue. Would this be a bad time to mention that it's going to get worse? The final chapter is always like that. Gotta have a decent climax.

Chapter 7: Chapter 7: Death and Resolution

AN: Time for the dark ending to this bleak story. Who will live? Who will die?

anonymous13: The puns... they burn! Surprised you mentioned *Cloverfield*, actually. I hate movies like that. "Ah! A monster! I'm just going to run around shaking the camera for two hours now! *We're all gonna die!*" And yes, the weeds are a little nod to *The Evil Dead*. Surprising since this isn't actually the Halloween-themed story.

Reish95: I will admit that this peril and destruction was rather fun to write, actually. I might just pass for a psychotic writer, if anything.

HKGhost: I won't pull a stunt like in *The Angels Take Manhattan*. Truth be told, I hate that episode of *Doctor Who*. There's not really a main bad guy in this story. Sort of. You'll see.

Chapter Seven: Death and Resolution

Staring at the seemingly impossible gap before them, the cubs all glanced at each other unsurely.

"Could we be in any more danger?" Nala asked. "A bridge would have been nice."

"It's the path of death, you dumbo," Binamu retorted. "They're not exactly going to give us a free ride, are they?"

"Okay!" Nala said, just about exhausted from Binamu's constant moaning all of the time. Couldn't the girl just lighten up for a few moments? *At least?* "So do *you* have any bright ideas that'll help us get over this thing?"

"No," she said simply. It was all Nala could do not to pummel her right in the face. Not only was she annoying—she was stupid. At least Wafu and Aibu were helpful! What was even the point of trying to save an ungrateful little brat like—?

Be nice, Nala, she reminded herself. *You don't want to go all 'red eyes' on everyone again. Be. Nice.*

The thought still nagged. Binamu didn't deserve to live. What benefit would she be when she grew up? Just someone who moped around the place all the time? What was even the point in trying to save her? It wasn't like it would *mean* anything—she still wouldn't change her feelings about Haiba. She'd just stay the same.

"I've got an idea," Haiba said, causing Binamu to roll her eyes.

"Oh, now what?" she asked, thinking that his idea was sure to result in all of their untimely deaths.

"We should jump down the pit," he told them.

"*Jump down the pit?*" Simba exclaimed. "Haiba, I don't know what you're thinking, but—"

"Oh, think about it," he interrupted. "The Pit of Despair? It's cubs' stuff. A scary story, that's all."

"But we *are* cubs," Aibu was quick to quietly point out. "And besides, just look at that pit. Who knows what horrors could be lurking below...?"

"There aren't any horrors," Haiba assured them. "The *real* despair would be to sit here and rot away for the rest of our lives. It's a trick. I'd bet that the pit leads to the safest place in this whole jungle."

"How can you even be sure of that?" Binamu asked. "You've never been sure of anything in your life—as I've seen!"

"Shut it," Haiba snapped, before continuing with his outlandish theory. "Look, there's no way across this pit—right?"

The other cubs glanced at each other. "Yes," they agreed.

"*Unless*," Haiba said, sticking a claw in the air, "you count the pit itself as a way across. Think about it."

"But... I..." Binamu sighed. "It just won't work. And it's not like I'm ever going to trust you."

"Fine," said Haiba. "Then you can stay here and starve. As for me—I'm getting out of here."

With that, Haiba leapt into the pit, before any of the others could protest.

Simba and Nala gaped at each other, mouths open wide. They couldn't believe he'd just done that.

They counted the seconds. Nothing. Not a sound or sight of Haiba from anywhere. He had to have perished in the pit... or ended up somewhere else.

"We've gotta go down after him," Simba said, standing at the edge of the pit.

"What? Are you *crazy*?" Binamu asked. "It's obvious! The idiot went and killed himself!"

"Maybe he did," Simba said. "Maybe he didn't. You coming, Nala?"

Nala shrugged. It wasn't like she couldn't do anything else. "Yeah," she said. "Maybe he ended up in some other part of the jungle—like he thought."

Binamu watched to her amazement as Aibu joined them. "Aibu, what do you think you're doing? You don't listen to *them*! You listen to *me*!"

He merely gave her an apologetic glance, before standing beside Simba and Nala. If he stuck with Binamu, then they would starve to death, just like Haiba had said. Logically, this really was their only option.

"You ready?" Simba asked. Nala and Aibu nodded.

Binamu rolled her eyes before walking over to the edge of the pit. It wasn't like she was going to remain there all on her own. "Whatever. Let's just get on with this."

"Then let's go."

With that, the four of them leapt into the pit.

They tumbled down, down, down into the darkness. Legs flailing all about the place, they all screamed as they plunged to their probably deaths.

But then, it seemed like the pit had decided to take a sudden curve.

With a loud grunt, Simba bumped and bounced at an impressive speed along the newfound slope.

"It's a... *slide*?" Simba exclaimed in surprise. He was going so fast that he couldn't even believe it. This was impossible!

The slid seemed to take another sudden curve—this time upwards. Simba could see a large circle of light up ahead as he raced towards the sky. "*Whoa!*" he cried, popping out of a hole and landing on the ground.

Blinking a few times, he returned to his senses. The first thing he noticed was Haiba, sitting on a rock with a smile on his face. "Welcome."

"*Yah!*" Nala wailed as she popped out of the hole, landing on her stomach.

"*Yikes!*" Aibu slid across his stomach, coming to a halt at Haiba's paws.

"Lame," Binamu remarked, as she lazily emerged from the hole, landing just at the edge of it.

"See? What did I tell ya?" Haiba hopped from the rock. "I knew that Pit of Despair thing was a load of nonsense."

They had ended up in a small clearing. Fallen leaves were scattered around the medium-sized hole they had all popped out of.

"Now we're free," he continued. "Probably five minutes away from the Pride La—"

"Guess again," Binamu interrupted, pointing to something in the sky.

They all looked to see that she was pointing at—not the sky—a huge rocky mountain in the distance.

"Let me guess," Simba said. "The Mountain of Utter Evil and Nasty Things?"

"Looks like it," Binamu replied, walking in its direction. "Guess we'd better start climbing it."

"You're eager," Haiba noticed, walking alongside her.

"I've been here for long enough," she said. "I just want to go home."

"How's life in the Grand Lands, anyway?" he asked. He hadn't been back since he'd first met Simba and Nala. He was planning on visiting his mother sooner or later, but something had always come up. He wondered if she worried about him sometimes... "You doing all right?"

"Fine without you," she retorted, not looking at him. She wasn't particularly interested in having any kind of conversation with her slimy toad of a cousin.

"You wouldn't be alive if it wasn't for me," Haiba told her. "You would have just stayed at the edge of the Pit of Despair for the rest of your life."

"Well, thanks," she mumbled, so quietly that Haiba couldn't understand her.

"What?" Haiba asked, not quite hearing.

"I said *thanks!*" she exclaimed, so loudly that everyone else could hear her now. She glanced around embarrassedly, before continuing towards the mountain. "Now leave me alone."

"I knew it," Haiba said with a satisfied smile.

"Knew what?" she asked.

"You know, don't you?" he said. "Deep down, you still like me."

"Haiba, I never—"

"No, not like that," he interrupted. "I mean as a cousin. A family thing. I know we didn't exactly leave on the best of terms, but... you knew there was still something between us... *didn't* you?"

"I... I don't know," she said. "I don't know anything anymore." She hurried ahead of him, intent on ending the conversation there and then.

Haiba didn't bother going after her. He knew the truth, and that was good enough for him. It wasn't like he had wanted for their relationship to end in such a horrible way. Hopefully they could still salvage what little was left of it.

She just had to trust him.

"So this is it," Simba said, as he stood with everyone else at the base of the mountain. "The Mountain of Utter Evil and Nasty Things."

It was huge. It looked like three mountains meshed into one. The cliffs in the Pride Lands had nothing on this!

"What exactly do we do?" Nala asked. "Climb to the top?"

"I guess," said Haiba. "Maybe it'll transport us out of here once we get there. After all, this whole place is magical."

"Exactly!" Simba exclaimed happily, before hopping onto a stony platform and beginning to climb his way up the towering mountain. "We'll be out of here in no time..."

Eleven Hours Later...

"We'll be out of here," he says," Haiba muttered as he climbed up what seemed like the thousandth rocky platform on the mountain. "No time," he says."

"Will you stop whining?" Simba complained, easing himself onto a large platform. Looking up, they appeared to be somewhere in the middle of the mountain. "We're halfway there."

"Oh, how comforting," Haiba said as he clambered onto the platform. His eyes widened at what he saw. "What the...?"

"What?" Simba turned around to follow his gaze, and then realised. "Okay. Now this is just getting weird."

Nala was the next to join them. "What on earth are you—? Oh."

Aibu helped Binamu up onto the platform. "Just what the heck is going on now?" she yelled. "I thought we were supposed to be—"

She cut herself off once she saw the forest in the middle of the mountain.

It was only a small forest—but the mere thought was enough to make their minds boggle. It just didn't make any sense!

Nestled in amongst a cluster of trees was a large stone podium. Placed on top was what appeared to be a glowing, amber stone.

"What do you think it is?" Binamu asked quietly, staring in awe at the stone.

"I don't know," Simba said, before approaching it. "But I guess we should find out. It could be our way out of here."

He reached up to the podium with a paw to touch the stone—

—when it suddenly exploded in a bright flash of light.

Wincing from the brightness, the cubs all watched as a clear image of a lion appeared before their eyes.

"Oh, *no*..." Simba moaned, realising who the lion was.

Hago coughed and spluttered, for reasons unknown to them all. "Damn dust..." He looked at them all. "Oh, hello there. I'd just like to thank you all for getting this far through my deadly traps. Blame this part of the jungle for having holes that unsuspecting lions like me can trip into. That's why I cursed this place with horrible monsters and evil weeds."

"Who's this clown?" Binamu asked.

"Long story," Simba mumbled.

"But I'm afraid that your efforts have been in vain," Hago explained to them. "You see, the *real* trap is to have you go through all of this misery just for you to die anyway."

"*What?*" Haiba yelled in surprise.

"Sorry to burst your bubble," he said, before chuckling. "Actually, no I'm not. I'm quite glad, actually."

"Oh, come on," Simba said. "There's gotta be more."

"Well, there is more," Hago continued. "You see, this little stone below you is the answer to all of your problems. That is, if you can figure it out. But I doubt you will. Happy death, suckers!"

The image of Hago disappeared, and the ground suddenly began to rumble beneath the cubs' paws.

"I really hate that guy," Haiba said, struggling to stay on the ground. "What the heck has he done *now?*"

Simba looked around worriedly as rocks began to tumble from the mountain. It was crumbling apart! "He's bringing the mountain crashing down!"

"Oh, *great!*" Haiba cried.

Nala hurried for the edge. "We have to climb back—"

She screamed as the part of the platform she was on suddenly collapsed, and she fell from the mountain.

"*Nala!*" Simba screamed, eyes wide with horror.

Nala grunted as she impacted with another platform on her stomach several feet below. Just before she could sigh in relief—

—a boulder came crashing down on her.

And that was how everything had ended up. Nala, lying on the ground, with a pool of blood underneath her, crushed by a boulder. What a miserable way to go.

But as she lay, slowly expiring, something else horrible was transpiring...

"Where's she gone?" Simba asked, looking around frantically. "Where did she go?"

"I don't know," Binamu replied, backing away from the crumbling platform. The wind had intensified, throwing rocks and debris all about the place. "She just fell off and—"

Binamu gasped in surprise as something suddenly struck her in the back.

Or, to be more precise, struck her *through* the back.

Looking down in horror, Binamu realised that there was a sharpened stick protruding from her stomach. The wind must have been so strong that it had impaled her.

"Binamu?" Haiba's eyes settled on her, and it didn't take him long to realise that something was wrong. "Binamu!"

As Simba ran to look for Nala, Haiba ran towards his cousin. Gasping in pain and shock, she collapsed to her back.

"What happened?" he cried, falling to her side, unable to believe what he was seeing. She had been impaled without warning. Once the initial panic had sunk in, he slowly came to the conclusion that she was dying.

"I... I..." she was hyperventilating. "Oh, it hurts... Haiba, it hurts..."

"It's okay," he assured her, even though he knew the truth. "It'll be okay..."

She grunted, tears streaming down her cheeks. "I'm... I'm going to die..." She stared him in the eyes. "Aren't I?"

He didn't answer. Doing his very best to comfort her in this time of despair, Haiba lightly stroked her across the forehead. "I'm sorry."

She sobbed. "No... I'm sorry. I... I shouldn't have done this to you, Haiba—but I just... I felt so angry. I felt betrayed. So hurt..."

"I know..." he said softly. "But it doesn't matter. I don't care anymore. It's okay, Binamu."

"I'm sorry," she repeated. "I'm so sorry. I..."

Her eyes flickered shut, and they stayed that way.

Binamu was gone.

"Binamu?" Haiba called, tears in his own eyes. "Binamu?"

He then suddenly realised all the blood on his paws, and fell away from her body in despair. "*No!*" he screamed, hitting the ground repeatedly in anger. "*No!*"

Crying, Haiba looked away from the body of his dead cousin. "It's not fair... *It's not fair! What's the point of even trying to save them if they die anyway? What's the point?*"

He was so angry and sad at the same time. She didn't deserve to die. He was just about making a connection with her—and now *this* had happened? He wondered how life could be so cruel...

Suddenly, his eyes snapped onto the stone podium where Hago had appeared. The amber stone still remained there, glowing lightly.

Not even knowing what he was doing, he walked towards the stone—ignoring the danger swarming all around him—and picked it up.

"*You see, this little stone below you is the answer to all of your problems.*" Hago's words rang in his head.

Haiba stared down at the stone as it turned a light blue colour. Like smoke pouring out from a fire, the colour began to seep out from the stone. He watched in amazement as it wafted towards Binamu—

—before passing right over her.

"Nala!" Simba hopped down several platforms before reaching Nala. Her lower half was crushed under a huge boulder. A pool of blood was seeping out from underneath her. "What happened?"

"Boulder..." she managed to sob out. "Crushing me..."

Pushing with all his might, Simba tried to shift the boulder. Grunting, he just about managed the job; the boulder tumbled away, down to the ground hundreds of feet below.

"Dying..." Nala wheezed. "Dying..."

"You're not gonna die," Simba said, although he had a horrible feeling that Nala was going to die right there and then. "I won't let you."

"Too late..." Nala rasped, eyes flickering shut. "I'm... sorry..."

"Nala, I—" Simba was interrupted by the sudden appearance of a strange blue mist wafting down from the mountain like an unearthly waterfall.

He watched in bemusement as the mist poured into Nala's open mouth, settling inside her body.

Her eyes snapped open and she gasped, full of life once more. Coming to her senses, she noticed Simba stood beside her. "Simba?"

He held her close to him. "It's okay, Nala," he said, grateful for whatever had brought her back to life. "It's okay..."

But for a certain cub above them, it was far from that.

"I don't understand it," Aibu said. "Why did it bring Nala back to life?"

Simba, Nala, Haiba and Aibu were stood in a safe part of the jungle, far away from the Path of Death and all the horrors contained within it. Once they had survived the crumbling of the mountain... the exit just seemed to present itself for them.

"I don't know," Simba replied honestly. "Maybe out of Binamu and Nala, it picked the one more likely to survive."

Nala shrugged, relieved that she'd survived the ordeal. "Maybe. Guess we'll never know."

Haiba had come up with his own theory. He knew what that stone had done. It was taunting him. Preyed on his hope that Binamu could survive and then sliced it in two. It had toyed with his emotions. Taken something very dear from him.

And it just wasn't fair. His point still stood. What was the point in trying to save her if she was just going to die anyway?

"You gonna be all right, Aibu?" Simba asked. He felt quite sorry for him. To lose three friends in a day had to be horrible.

"I'll be all right," he assured Simba. "Besides, I did once win a lifetime membership at Jowai Resort. I think I might just use it."

Nala's mouth dropped open. "No..."

Aibu smiled, giving them a little wave. "See ya," he said, before bounding off into the jungle.

"I don't believe it," Nala said in shock. "The lucky guy..." She felt rather jealous at the idea of Aibu being groomed and pampered by some pretty lionesses for the rest of his life. On the other hand, he did deserve something of a happy ending...

Be nice, Nala, she told herself once more. *Be. Nice.*

Simba and Nala turned their attention towards Haiba. "You okay, Haiba?" he asked.

He did nothing. Just stared at the ground. They wouldn't be able to understand the enormous loss that he had suffered. It felt more horrible than they could possibly imagine.

Haiba smiled at them. "Yeah," he said, masking the intense misery stirring inside of him. "Why wouldn't I be?"

The End

AN: Hmm... I bet some of you were split between whether it would be Binamu or Aibu who would die in the end. Do you think she should have lived? It was either her or Nala, remember.

And now comes the cool part. The next story is for Halloween! I'll be updating every day from the 28th October, leading right up to Halloween itself! This is gonna be a creepy one...

NEXT TIME: Shocker, the Interceptor and Froggy all meet up one night to resurrect one of Simba's old enemies. The one that hasn't been seen in ages. The one that no one speaks of anymore. And when he comes back to life, even the villains agree that he needs to be stopped...